



**Te Kauono Tutara e te Mana Tiaki  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration**

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*Remarks by the Honourable Mark Brown, Prime Minister of the  
Cook Islands and Minister of Foreign Affairs & Immigration*

*Waitangi Day and Welcome Reception for the Rt Hon. Winston  
Peters, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs  
of New Zealand*

***Acknowledgements***

Deputy Prime Minister, Rt Honourable Winston Peters,

Minister of Health, Hon. Dr Shane Reti and your delegation  
from New Zealand

High Commissioner H.E. Tui Dewes and staff of the New  
Zealand High Commission

Nga Ariki e toru i rotopu ia tatou

Te tu'anga o te Evangelia, kia koe e te Bishop

Members of cabinet and caucus, Opposition leader Mrs Tina  
Browne and Mr Richard Browne

Senior Officials, business community & civil society  
representatives

Ladies and gentlemen – Kia Ora, e Kia Orana

***Waitangi Day***

It is an honour to be here at Ngatipa this evening, to acknowledge **Waitangi Day** and to join with you Deputy Prime Minister representing the government and people of New Zealand to reflect.

For me, Waitangi Day is an opportunity to pause and reflect on the foundations of New Zealand – it's history – bedded in Te Tiriti, signed in 1840 – and how it has helped to shape and mould the New Zealand that is today.

Waitangi Day is also an opportunity to reflect on our respective contributions to each other's development and the ties that bind us together as peoples of New Zealand and the Cook Islands. Ties that go back centuries and generations, and which to present day see our economies and communities intertwined in such a way that what each of us do into the future, will have direct implications for the other.

### ***Cook Islands – New Zealand Relationship***

Our people are the cornerstone of the close economic, cultural, political, and social bonds between our nations. New Zealand is now home to more than 80,000 Cook Islanders who have over decades settled roots and contributed to New Zealand's economic prosperity and social and cultural vibrancy.

### **Waka Hourua – Vaka Purua**

In 2022, our two governments signed a statement of partnership - '*Waka Hourua/ Vaka Purua*'

*Waka Houroa/Vaka Purua* anchors our relationship in our centuries-old ties, interwoven with our Maori values and commits our two nations to upholding one another's mana as we work to improve our prosperity, well-being, security, and environment in these increasingly uncertain times.

In my discussions with the Deputy Prime Minister this morning, we reaffirmed our commitment to future cooperation across those four areas within our Vaka Houroa/Vaka Purua partnership.

### ***To the future***

## **Under priority area 1 – Tupu'anga Ruperupe – Prosperity**

This morning, our governments jointly committed investment into the new Punanga Nui Farmers market in recognition of the resilient and entrepreneurial nature of our community driven marketplace and the transformative contribution they can offer our communities and economy.

New Zealand was instrumental in supporting our COVID response efforts and in the recovery endeavour since.

The Infrastructure Trust Fund we jointly created has supported joint investment in critical public infrastructure but it requires further investment, if we are to sustain the recovery outcomes we are starting to harness, particularly as COVID debt repayments start to fall due for the Cook Islands.

It is important to note that New Zealand continues to be a significant beneficiary of the Cook Islands economic recovery and growth – through the skilled workforce, Cook Islanders and migrant workers, who've migrated to New Zealand since COVID onset, and our own Cook Islands businesses who purchase over \$200M worth of goods and services from New Zealand companies each year especially now as our tourism visitors rise steadily. A strong Cook Islands economy is good business for NZ.

We look forward to working closely with New Zealand to ensure the next iteration of the Core Sector Support programme delivers the development outcomes we both aspire to and that our delivery mechanisms remain agile and timely in their implementation abilities.

I welcomed the opportunity this morning to provide an update on our sea bed minerals development efforts and look forward to collaborating with New Zealand on opportunities for joint scientific research and exploration as well as monitoring, compliance and enforcement cooperation.

### **Under priority area 2 - Turanga Memeitaki – Well-being**

Our people are the heart of our nation, and I am delighted the Health Minister, the Hon. Shane Reti, was able to visit our hospital and engage directly with our Minister and health practitioners.

While we have a number of existing health co-operation arrangements, I am confident there is more we can do to support our separate and shared health and well-being aspirations.

The partnerships we committed during the COVID response period delivered New Zealand health assistance to the Cook Islands. It also saw Cook Islands assistance to New Zealand, specifically in the vaccination campaign of Pacific people's across New Zealand.

We look forward to working closely with New Zealand to consolidate our health-health cooperation and arrangement through the designation of the Rarotonga hospital as a referring hospital, more targeted health specialist visit

programs and joint efforts to reduce the incidences of non-communicable diseases.

### **Under priority area 3 - Paruru'anga Ipukarea – Security.**

We welcome our existing law enforcement and border agencies co-operation arrangements and the recent expansion in our broader defence and security arrangements, including in partnership with Australia and regional entities.

As we look to the future and take account of security and defence challenges across the globe, we see value in expansion of our current defence and security co-operation arrangements to also include Australia within a trilateral framework.

Such a trilateral arrangement would in our view encapsulate the existing multi-decade areas of security cooperation including through the Defence Cooperation Program, the Pacific Maritime Security Program, and regional mechanism such as the Pacific Transnational Crime Network. It would also support expansion of cooperation in cyber security and air and maritime border security.

### **Under priority area 4 - Ao Natura – Environment –**

We welcome and thank New Zealand for the initial \$24million in bilateral funding under the Kerekere Moana Partnership, announced today. This funding will assist support Cook Islands climate resilience efforts relating to renewable energy investments, battery replacements, cyclone shelter upgrades and water security.

We encourage New Zealand to pledge a commitment to the Pacific Resilience Facility and to work with our Pacific Islands Forum family to raise the remaining capital required to operationalise the PRF as soon as possible.

## **Memberships support**

Next year, in 2025, we turn 60. 60 years of self-governing in free association with New Zealand.

We look forward to working with New Zealand and IMF members to securing IMF membership so we may be able to broaden our access to development finance particularly in light of our graduation in 2020 to high income status.

We also look forward to New Zealand support for our legitimate aspirations to be able to take our place, behind our flag, at the Commonwealth and the United Nations table.

Our successful convening of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in November last year, and the international engagements we have been able to lead as Forum Chair secured investments of the kind by Saudi Arabia in the Pacific Resilience Facility and the participation of the Pacific Islands Forum at the G7. These outcomes for the Pacific, achieved during our Chair tenure, are affirmations of the unique contributions the Cook Islands can bring to global discussions that directly impact the well-being of Pacific people.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with New Zealand, Forum members and our Secretariat in Suva during 2024 to deliver on our Forum Chair responsibilities and the instructions of Leaders detailed in the Leaders communique.

## ***Concluding Remarks***

Deputy Prime Minister, Honourable Minister, thank you for visiting and thank you for New Zealand's steadfast partnership.

I look forward to working closely with you both to advance our shared aspirations in preparation for our Joint Ministerial Forum so we may deliver transformative outcomes for our peoples.

Safe travels onwards to Samoa and to High Commissioner Dewes and your team, Meitaki maata for the wonderful hospitality this evening.